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ABSTRACT

Interviews with a random sample of 345 day and evening students and 45 staff members were conducted at Santa Ana College (SAC) in March 1981 to determine perceptions of the SAC college community toward the Rancho Santiago Community College District Police Department. The interviewees were asked to indicate: (1) if they had ever interacted with a college police officer and, if so, for what purpose; (2) whether District officers were efficient, courteous, and fair during these encounters; (3) opinions concerning the department's general image on campus; (4) individual attitudes toward the police; and (5) perceived ratings of the importance of police department goals and the degree to which they have been achieved. In addition, open-ended comments about the police were solicited. Selected findings reveal that 49% of the interviewees had interacted at least once with an officer and that more than half of these respondents rated the officers as efficient (73.9%), courteous (65.2%), and fair (77%). Responses concerning personal attitudes toward the police and the Department's general campus image revealed a wide range of attitudes on a scale of 1 (good) to 5 (poor). While older students tended to have more positive attitudes toward the police than younger students, no attitudinal differences were discerned between ethnic groups, day and evening students, and students and staff. The study report summarizes findings and conclusions. (JP)

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RANCHO SANTIAGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

POLICE IMAGE SURVEY

SANTA ANA COLLEGE

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

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RSCCD Police Image Survey

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May 1980

INTRODUCTION & METHOD

In December 1980, the RSCCD Board of Trustees, on the recommendation of the Assistant Superintendent, Fiscal Administration, requested that the Institutional Research Office "conduct a survey to determine how the district police department is perceived by the total college community." Specifically it was decided to survey SAC students and staff to determine their attitudes toward the police in regard to their efficiency, effectiveness, and image. Personal on-campus interviews were selected as a means to solicit the most candid and straightforward responses. A two percent random sample size (n=390) of the SAC population was chosen. Relative to SAC's population, half of those interviews were conducted during the day and half in the evening. Interviews were completed in March 1981 within a three week period. A copy of the interview is included in this report.

A comparison of the characteristics of the sample and the total student population is provided in Table 1. The sample appears representative of the gender of all students. On age, the sample includes a higher percentage of those under 20 years of age, those students who are present on campus for longer periods of time, but otherwise is representative. On ethnicity, the distribution of the sample includes a larger percentage of minorities, ensuring representation of those students' opinions in the study. The sample also included

11.6%, or 45, staff members.

FINDINGS

Type of Police - Respondent Encounters

Respondents were asked if they had ever interacted with a district police officer and, if so, for what purpose. About half, or 49%, had interacted once or more with an officer. The frequency of reasons for those encounters is shown in Table 2. It can be seen that the distribution of reasons is varied, and that the police are equally divided between performing service activities and law enforcement activities. Asking for information and parking violation citations are the two most frequent, official purposes for officer - client contacts.

During those occasions, respondents were asked if the officers were efficient, courteous, and fair, and the results are provided in Table 3. For the majority of occasions, the officers' behavior was rated favorably. They were more often rated as being fair and impartial in judgement, 77.0% of the time, than they were courteous and helpful, 65.2% of the time.

District Police Image

Respondents were asked to rate their perception of the general campus image of district police as well as their own attitude towards, or image of, the campus police, both on a scale of one through five. Those results are in Table 4, and

it can be seen that scores for the two measures differ. Both the mean and modal scores for personal attitudes towards district police were higher than ratings of their general image. The distributions have large ranges, demonstrating varied opinions.

The data in Table 5 shows the distributions of the same ratings by age, ethnicity, day-night and student-staff identity of respondent. It can be seen that positive attitudes towards the police increased with the age group, and respondents under 20 years of age expressed the least favorable attitudes toward district police. There is, however, no significant difference in the distributions by ethnic group. The general image of police reported by night students is rated higher than that by day students, who are usually younger. No notable differences are seen between staff and student attitudes.

Finally, respondents were asked to rate the value and importance of police department goals and purposes as well as their perceived achievement of those goals by police (see Table 6). While respondents most often rated "protecting individuals" as a very important police function, respondents most often said that police were performing a good job "enforcing laws and regulations." And "enforcing laws and regulations" was least often rated as a very important function. Overall performance in terms of goals and functions was most often rated good.

Respondents were additionally asked to comment in an open-ended fashion on their opinions regarding district police. Those comments, which are too lengthy to include verbatim in this report, are summarized below. (The actual interview forms are available in the Research Office to anyone who cares to read each and every one.) Approximately one quarter of the respondents offered no further opinions, one quarter offered positive comments, one quarter negative, and one quarter mixed. The positive remarks primarily emphasized respondents appreciation of feeling secure knowing that the police are there, doing a good job. Less favorable comments usually cited officers' rudeness, flirtatiousness, lack of sensitivity, or sense of superiority or authoritarianism. Many requested increased officer visability at night. Several mentioned articles read in El Don, including controversy over carrying weapons, and rumors that officers issue unnecessary parking citations.

CONCLUSION

Not having comparable data from similar surveys assessing other police agencies' images, it is difficult to determine whether the SAC student and staff image of RSCCD district police is a function of district police behavior and policy, or all general attitudes towards men in uniform.

The results of this study regarding the district police image are varied, among respondents and on different criteria.

While generally their image is a positive one, as shown by respondents' quantitative ratings of them, ranges of opinions are great, and room for improvement exists.

On the favorable side, respondents are appreciative of the presence and behavior of the police during official encounters. During those contacts, they most often were rated as fair and impartial in judgement as well as efficient, knowledgeable, and professional. Also, on a scale of one through five, with five being positive, respondents rated their personal attitudes towards police five or four 64% of the time.

Their rating of the general campus image of district police is slightly lower, especially by younger daytime students. Whether this is a function of bad publicity in El Don (most frequently read by day students), an expression of young persons' traditional rebellion towards authority, police actions and policy, or all of those is not known.

Also on the less favorable side, a sizeable number of respondents characterized the police as rude or arrogant. Their lowered rating on courtesy during contacts somewhat reflects this attitude.

The following recommendations, in addition to maintaining present policies, are drawn from these findings:

1. The district police should be commended for their generally favorable image in spite of their somewhat conflicting functions — enforcing laws and providing service — and the difficult, often thankless, job they must perform.

2. In recent years, most police agencies have implemented public relations programs to enhance their public image and gain cooperation of constituents. This is recommended for RSCCD police, especially in light of recent publicity. Students and staff need to be informed of their multiple missions and the good job they have done.

3. The need for increased visibility and/or staffing of police during the evening should be investigated.

4. On-going staff development for police officers should be implemented to heighten their sensitivity to constituents' needs and the importance and methods of maintaining a positive image, and to promote professional and friendly attitudes by police.

TABLE 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF POLICE STUDY SAMPLE

AND ALL SAC STUDENTS

VARIABLE	Sample* n = 390	All SAC n = 18771
	percents	
Age		
Below 20	23.7%	15.7%
Twenties	46.3	51.6
Thirties	18.9	17.7
Forties	5.5	8.9
Over 50	5.3	6.0
Ethnicity		
White	60.0%	69.0%
Hispanic	13.7	14.1
Other Non-White	3.9	8.5
Black	13.2	4.5
Asian	7.9	2.8
Philippine	1.1	0.7
Gender		
Male	47.9%	49.1%
Female	50.3	50.9
Status		
Student	88.2%	X
Staff Member	7.9	
Both	3.7	

* Percents may not sum to 100 due to rounding and unknown values.

TABLE 2

TYPES OF POLICE-RESPONDENT CONTACTS

TYPE	FREQUENCY	
	n	%
To ask for information	61	20.9
Traffic violation, cited	21	7.2
Traffic violation, warned	12	4.1
Parking violation, cited	38	13.1
Parking violation, warned	18	6.2
Other violation	6	2.1
Request help for auto	35	6.3
Request help for other	26	3.4
Lost and found	23	2.9
Open room for staff	8	2.8
Inquiry regarding citation	8	2.8
Other reason	35	12.0

TABLE 3

Rated Behavior of District Police During Encounters With Respondents

Was the Officer:	Yes	No	Slightly
		percents	
Efficient, knowledgeable, & professional	73.9	16.7	9.4
Courteous & helpful	65.2	24.2	10.6
Fair, impartial in judgement	77.0	13.8	9.1

Rated Image of District Police by Respondents

TABLE 4

	Good 5	4	Fair 3	2	Poor 1	Mean Score
			percents			
General Image	20.1	23.7	35.6	16.2	4.3	3.4
Personal Attitude	30.5	33.1	22.5	9.0	4.8	3.8

TABLE 5

Rated Image of District Police
by Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	General Image					Personal Attitude				
	Good 5	4	Fair 3	2	Poor 1	Good 5	4	Fair 3	2	Poor 1
	percents					*percents*				
Age										
Under 20	4.4	20.6	44.1	23.5	7.4	15.1	32.9	32.9	12.3	6.8
Twenties	20.3	27.5	31.3	16.0	4.6	31.1	32.4	21.6	9.5	5.4
Thirties	28.0	26.0	40.0	12.0	2.0	33.9	40.7	15.3	6.8	3.4
Forties	53.8	15.4	23.1	7.7	0	57.1	21.4	21.4	0	0
Fifties	50.0	10.0	30.0	10.0	0	63.6	18.2	9.1	9.1	0
Over 50	60.0	0	40.0	0	0	40.0	40.0	20.0	0	0
Ethnicity										
White	19.4	23.6	34.5	18.2	4.2	29.3	33.2	25.0	9.8	2.7
Hispanic	22.0	24.4	29.3	14.6	9.8	39.6	31.3	20.8	4.2	4.2
Black	22.2	19.4	41.7	16.7	0	30.2	27.9	18.6	11.6	11.6
Asian	13.6	22.7	50.0	13.6	0	19.0	47.6	14.3	14.3	4.8
Philippine	50.0	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	50.0	0	50.0
Other non-white	18.2	36.4	36.4	0	9.1	33.3	41.7	16.7	0	8.3
Day/Night										
Day	14.2	25.2	38.1	17.4	5.2	24.4	37.5	26.3	9.4	2.5
Night	27.9	22.1	32.0	14.8	3.3	36.7	28.7	18.7	8.7	7.3
Status										
Student	19.6	23.0	37.9	14.5	5.1	30.9	31.2	24.2	9.3	4.5
Staff member	21.4	28.6	23.8	26.1	0	26.8	46.3	12.2	7.3	7.3

TABLE 6

RATED VALUE AND ACHIEVEMENT OF POLICE GOALS & FUNCTIONS

GOAL	RATED VALUE			RATED ACHIEVEMENTS		
	Very important	Important	Not Important	Good Job	Fair Job	Poor Job
	percents			*percents*		
Preventing unsafe conditions	56.4	40.2	3.5	60.7	34.4	4.8
Protecting facilities & property	54.4	41.9	3.7	65.9	30.0	4.1
Protecting individuals	79.1	19.0	1.9	63.3	29.0	7.8
Enforcing laws & regulations	44.0	50.7	5.4	74.4	20.0	5.6
Providing helping services	51.6	40.9	7.5	57.9	32.1	10.0